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Assessment

TEN METRICS FOR IMPROVING EMPLOYER SATISFACTION

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — When a restaurateur asks patrons how their meals taste, the answer is all too often no more elaborate or critical than “fine.” Asking the busboys and dishwashers how much of the night’s special entrée customers left untouched on their plates yields a better picture of whether the food was any good.

Finding different ways to keep tabs on customer satisfaction is a lesson that workforce development consultant Larry Robbin recalled from being born into a restaurant family and it’s a lesson he thinks should be applied to employment services.

Leading a workshop at the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals’ annual conference May 14, Robbin urged workforce professionals to try 10 different techniques for measuring how well their agencies attract and serve employers.

“If you really dig into these concepts and put them into your programs, you will improve your services to your business partners,” he said. “They’ll start thinking of your agency as a core partner in their business — not a spice, but a critical ingredient in their operations.”

Keeping an eye on the success of marketing, to find out whether employers are being attracted or bothered by mailings, fliers and other devices, is the first tactic Robbin suggested.

“People in workforce development are famous for doing mass mailings without really thinking about how much of a response they should get and, frankly, the majority of materials coming out of workforce development organizations are boring,” Robbin said.

He recommended that workforce professionals keep tabs on their marketing response rates and compare them to typical response rates for commercial mass mailings of 3 to 5 percent.

To improve response, Robbin suggested developing both generic employer outreach materials and materials that are geared to a few industrial sectors.

Also, he recommended that workforce system marketers avoid trying to sell their services to employers by highlighting their clients’ barriers.

“Hire trained jobseekers from our youth program,” is a far better pitch than “hire disadvantaged

youth from our training program,” according to Robbin.

A second measure he recommended is the percentage of job leads an agency receives and can fill in a timely manner.

While sending out clients to fill job orders is always good thing, collecting many more leads from employers than an organization is able to find workers to fill may irritate and perhaps drive away business customers. Robbin suggested that workforce professionals promote the sharing of job leads among their agencies’ different offices and programs, as well as with other agencies in their communities that take job orders.

Also, he urged organizations to “be humble.”

“Market to the businesses for whom you know you have people to fill their jobs and market strategically to your capacity,” he said. “Don’t overpromise and underdeliver.”

Speed, Timeliness

Are your services delivered as fast as possible? That’s the third factor Robbin suggested to workforce professionals.

Think about how quickly private placement agencies deliver workers and job applicants to their customers, and be honest with employers about your speed in responding to their requests, he coached. Encourage staff to come up with ways to improve processes and paperwork in order to fill job orders more efficiently and ask outsiders for advice on improving efficiency, he added.

“You might want to ask on your follow-up surveys to businesses if you are timely enough, fast enough for them,” Robbin suggested.

Knowing the percentage of jobseekers sent to interviews who are actually hired is a crucial fourth metric for workforce professionals, according to the consultant. Differing from the second measure of whether an agency can find warm bodies to fill job orders, this is a success rate that should be fed back to case managers and business services representatives.

It tells case managers how well they are preparing their clients and business specialists how well they are matching jobseekers to jobs, Robbin said.

To improve this rate, staff who teach clients interviewing skills can be sent to job shadow or even interview with private sector hiring managers. Also, agencies can arrange to trade clients with sister

agencies for mock interviews so that clients have a chance to practice their skills in unfamiliar settings.

“Mock interviews without stress have nothing to do with real interviews,” Robbin said.

Business services representatives should be seeking feedback from hiring managers about how well their referrals meet their needs and might ask, “What types of people work best in your company?” he suggested.

A fifth and perhaps more subjective factor that the expert recommended is how your agency’s services compare with other ways firms meet their staffing needs.

“Your competition is the businesses’ traditional way of hiring, whatever it was. Is your training as effective as the training that the business provided or got from another source? How well do the people that the business hires from you compare to the people they hire with their traditional approach?” Robbin said.

A rate of employer requests that represents repeat and expanded business is the consultant’s sixth recommendation.

Agencies might set a goal of encountering repeat business from 75 percent of the employers they work with in a given year. To improve repeat business rates, business services staff might make special efforts to inform employers of the variety of services their agencies can offer, he recommended.

Agencies should also constantly ask their business customers if they can be used as references and, as an eighth metric, should capture the percentage of business customers who agree to these requests, according to Robbin.

One way he described to gather and keep a current reference list for the business community is to regularly update and publish a flier with the headline “Business Hiring From Us” above images of employers you have served, with your agency’s contact information running along the base of the page.

The consultant urged workforce professionals to ask every business customer to be a reference, be-

cause the act of doing so offers additional opportunities to converse with unwilling employers about what an agency could have done better to meet their needs.

Along this line, an eighth factor that Robbin suggested monitoring is the percentage of employers who contact a career center or employment program on a referral from other businesses leaders.

“If businesses aren’t referring people to you, ask them why. The best way to get feedback is to invite criticism,” the consultant said.

Ninth on Robbin’s list of employer satisfaction measures is a dissatisfied customer recapture rate.

Agencies should keep track of whether employers who have a bad experience can be convinced to place another job order or request another service, he said.

“Every product and service will fail at some point but one failure can easily cost you your reputation. Imagine that one of your little darlings got hired but didn’t show up on their first day of work. You’ve got to get down to that business for a face-to-face immediately. You’ve got to take the heat and you can make up for it by offering to involve a higher authority, such as your executive director or offering to commit double staff to any future requests for referrals they may give you,” Robbin said.

The consultant’s final measure of employer satisfaction is a basic principle of commerce, the old adage that “If it is any good, it’s worth paying for.”

A sure sign that workforce agencies know they are meeting employers’ expectations is when they can provide a set of free basic services — such as jobseeker referrals — while offering a menu of fee-for-service possibilities that employers also utilize, Robbin said.

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—Ryan Hess

About ETR — The *Employment & Training Reporter* is a weekly trade journal covering the field of workforce development since 1969, with a special emphasis on public sector programs.

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